



1924 Seasonal Report of L. G. Wingard

BY

Seattle, Washington
Sept. 18, 1924

ALASKA
FISHERIES

The Commissioner of Fisheries,
Washington.

I herewith present the following general report
covering fishing operations in the Alaska Peninsula Area
for the season of 1924.

Respectfully submitted,

Samuel G. Wingard
Assistant Agent

IN GENERAL:

The year was marked by no unusual features, weather conditions perhaps excepted. A cold spring and a backward summer with repeated storms and heavy sea weather together with raw, miserable winds, made of the season something of a physical hardship for both fishermen and operators. There was some destruction of gear, and packers all over the district found it hard to place traps on account of the continued storms and heavy weather.

Generally speaking, all operators secured a large pack and enjoyed a prosperous season under the new regulative policy adopted by the bureau.

CANNERIES OPERATED:

Six salmon canneries were operated in the Alaska Peninsula Area this season, they being as follows:

Port Moller,	operated by the Pacific American Fisheries
Ikatan,	" " " "
King Cove,	" " " "
False Pass,	" " P. E. Harris and Co.
Squaw Harbor,	" " Shumigan Packing Co.
Herendeen Bay,	" " Everett Packing Co.

The following canneries were not operated this season:

Herendeen Bay Plant of the Phoenix Packing Co.
Herendeen Bay Plant of the Fidalgo Packing Co.
Nelson's Lagoon Plant of the Pacific American Fisheries.

Noted
W. C. M.

NEW CANNERIES:

There is talk or rumor rather, of several new canneries going into the Peninsula Area in the near future. Chris Hale, well known operator of the Bristol Bay Region, made a survey of the Shumigan Country during the summer with the announced intention of building a cannery. Whether or not there is a sufficient volume of fish in the Peninsula Area to warrant the locating of other plants is an open question, which additional operations alone will tell.

SALMON RUNS:

There are two characters of salmon runs in the waters of the Peninsula Area. These are what is known as the "migrating" run and the "local" runs.

The run of "migrating" salmon commences late in May and continues until mid-September. The schools first appear in the Shumigan Group of Islands and forge westward from there. Invariably they next appear off Cape Pankof and enter Ikatan Bay, later showing in Morzhovoi Bay and other waters of the Alaska Peninsula.

The "local" runs composed of fish that find their parent streams in the Peninsula Area, do not follow any known route, they intermingle with the heavier run of "migrating" salmon, and leave it at various points for their several spawning streams.

THIS SEASON'S RUNS:

The salmon runs this season were strong with one exception, that of the reds. Where last year but one plant packed its allotment, under the reservation, this year all plants but one either packed what they outfitted for or exceeded the allotment placed upon them, under the old permit system at the start of the season. The exception was the Everett Packing Co. of Herendeen Bay. They left the district before the other packers when the runs slackened in the vicinity of the Bear and Sandy rivers, it being impossible to retain their purse seiners.

The runs of humpbacks and dogs following the run of reds, were longer and more consistently maintained than the runs of these varieties last season. Canneries this season made fair catches up to the middle of August. Last season catching practically ended the middle of July, although fishing continued as late as it did this year.

The season was about as long as last year, the canneries clearing for home about the same time as in the 1923 season but with much larger packs. A big red pack - greatly desired by all - was not realized but the run of dogs and humpbacks more than made up the deficiency in quantity if not in quality. The red salmon run this year was even weaker than the weak run of last season although more intense during the run period. They appeared suddenly and packed the traps to capacity for a few days only to disappear almost completely. Then followed a slack period followed by the main run of dogs and humpbacks.

In the Shumigan Islands, the humpbacks and dogs after the beginning of the run, kept the Kelly Rock and Big Valley traps of the Shumigan Packing Co. of Squaw Harbor, full until the middle of August, when the runs weakened. This was likewise true of these runs in Pavlof and Bear Bays, fished by the Pacific American Fisheries of King Cove. Fair quantities of dogs and humpbacks were also taken from the Little John trap of the Pacific American Fisheries, in Morzhovoi Bay and the P. E. Harris trap in East Anchor Cove. Very few humpbacks and dogs were taken from the traps in Ikatan Bay proper. During the latter part of the season while the humpback and dog salmon run was in progress and after the reservation had been abolished, purse seining and beach seining was resorted to wherever the fish could be found. The P. E. Harris Company of False Pass, secured many thousands of fish with a beach seine near Morzhovoi village in Isanotski Strait. They also fished with beach seines in Little John Lagoon in Morzhovoi Bay and in Leonard Harbor in Cold Bay. The Pacific American Fisheries of King Cove obtained considerable quantities of dog salmon by means of half purse seines in Cold Bay and used a full purse seine and a beach seine in the vicinity of Deer Island and Leonard Harbor. Beach seines were also utilized in Bear Bay and Captain's Harbor. The run of humpbacks in Pavlof Bay was perhaps more intense than has ever been experienced in that locality and the fish seemed to hold off from the streams with very little inclination to enter until the middle of August, when the storms scattered the schools. The run of dogs in Bear Bay was good, lasting until about the middle of August. Silvers put in an appearance in the early days of August and were later taken in great quantities, greater than ever before in this district. Canning continued until these inferior runs of dogs, silvers and humpbacks finally slackened and the closing order of August 23rd prohibited the further depletion of the already decimated hoards.

A very heavy catch strain was placed this season upon all salmon runs of the Alaska Peninsula Area, owing to the length of the season and the unlimited cannery packs.

RUN CONSERVATION:

The problem of Run Conservation is, for obvious reasons, complex and difficult of solution from the nature of these waters and it is likely that no better plan can be devised than the old allotment plan. However, as this plan has been relegated to the scrap heap through an act of Congress, other measures must be taken to handle the situation. In my opinion the season should be limited. No fishing should begin before June 1st, and no fishing should be allowed after August 20th. Port Moller and vicinity, excepting Nelson's Lagoon, should be governed by practically the same rule as the Bristol Bay Area, except that fishing in the Port Moller region should be permitted approximately ten days sooner and stopped a few days earlier. A thirty-six hour close period throughout the fishing season, should be adequate. In the Peninsula Area the thirty-six hour close season affords adequate protection providing purse seines and floating traps are prohibited as in Cook's Inlet. This may not be in accordance with the opinions of some of the cannery operators but will be a big safe-guard to the district. A driven trap is a stationary fishing appliance and once placed must remain for the season while floating traps are more portable and purse seines are especially destructive owing to their ability to pursue the schools from place to place and are much harder to regulate and control. Beach seining is a satisfactory method whereby the local residents may make their desired catches.

STREAM IMPROVEMENT:

The several Red Salmon propagating grounds of the Peninsula Area are principally lakes of modest size out of which small streams flow to the sea. In some instances these streams are not of sufficient volume to keep open a well defined channel through the beach sand and gravel where it meets the sea. The result is that salmon often wait for a favorable tide or a heavy rain on which to enter the stream. With the help of the Merganser crew on numerous occasions, I opened channels or fairways in the mouths of all such streams entering Kinzaroff's Lagoon. The difficulty with this effort was that the first storm would sweep away the last vestige of these channels and the waters of the stream would again be seeping through the sand of the beach as before. Likely the best way to handle this situation is to leave the river mouths and the waiting salmon in the hands of Nature as they have been throughout the ages, as the spawning delay is usually of short duration. The first high tide or storm gives the salmon their opportunity to enter the river, and the delay simply matures the salmon for spawning.

Of course in this relation it should be remembered that only a very small number of Red Salmon spawn in the waters of this region, the Red run found here being a migrating one.

LAGOON FISHING:

Naturally falling in line with the issues raised in the foregoing paragraph is fishing inside the lagoons, as this is a grave, perhaps a vital issue in the life of a salmon run entering such waters. While lagoon fishing is not on or actually at the spawning grounds, it is still within the mouth of the salmon stream and inside the bar across which the salmon have a great deal of difficulty in passing. The flat nature of the lagoon bottom, shallowness of the water and its many channels often also detain the ascending salmon for several days. In the early part of the season, when the salmon are not yet mature for spawning, they play about in the channels of these lagoons for days and are easily caught. Operators prefer to fish inside of the lagoons for several reasons, the principle one of which is the protection they offer from surf and storms. A great deal of the time it is impossible to fish "outside" while fishing can be carried on, on all tides within the lagoon, and the fish are more easily caught by reason of the fact that they have only a narrow passage in which to enter in comparison with the extent of the wide sea beach.

REGULATION OF LAGOON FISHING:

There should be a Bureau ruling in regard to lagoon fishing. As it is carried on at present, it is a menace to the future of the runs. Undoubtedly the lagoons in the Peninsula region can stand considerable fishing without endangering the runs entering them but some steps must be taken to insure a proper escapement of salmon to the spawning grounds. The runs in these various lagoons fluctuate from year to year as do all salmon runs and the only way in which they can be adequately protected is by means of a season of limited length prohibiting fishing after a certain date. This date can best be determined by the Bureau's representative in the field who can check up on the run providing for proper escapement of salmon. It is true in many, if not all lagoons that the fish after entering their parent stream play about in the waters thereof for many days and sometimes weeks before ascending the streams flowing into the lagoon. This affords the operator fishing in the lagoon, a great deal of advantage in securing his catch. As the season advances the fish entering the lagoons are more mature and after playing about a short time, color up rapidly. In my opinion, at this stage in the run fishing should be stopped and the remainder of the run allowed to pass on to the spawning grounds.

Fishing should be stopped at various times in varying localities. This can only be determined yearly as the run is observed by the representative in the field and he should be vested with the power to limit or prohibit fishing in various lagoons after certain dates, should the runs therein require it.

SALMON ESCAPEMENTS:

An estimate of the escapement of migrating runs would be so doubtful that I will not make a hazard in that direction.

The local runs, however, were as closely checked as time and weather would permit. Spawning streams and lagoons were visited at every available opportunity and the escapement to the spawning areas of the Peninsula region was uniform but moderate. Many of the lagoons could have absorbed a greater escapement to all appearances but without many days of study and travel over the spawning grounds it would be hard to determine just how many more fish should have escaped.

The streams of the Peninsula Area frequented by dog salmon and humpbacks were more easy of access and much more quickly covered. The dog and humpback run this year in the Peninsula Area, was very heavy and these species enjoyed an adequate escapement to their various spawning grounds. However, of all the dog and humpback streams visited in the Peninsula Area, only two streams, one in Bear Bay and one in Pavlof Bay near the head of Canoe Bay seemed to have more fish in them than was really necessary, the one in Bear Bay was mainly a dog salmon stream, while the Pavlof Bay stream contained practically all humpbacks. The other streams visited as before said, while pretty well seeded, still could absorb a larger run. The closing order of August 23rd will undoubtedly furnish these streams with this additional amount.

SALMON PACK:

As before stated this was the "off year" for red salmon and no record breaking packs were made of this species. The runs of fish of inferior quality which later put in an appearance more than completed the case allotment for the individual canneries but from the stand-point of the packer the season was not overly profitable owing to the large percentage of cheaper grade fish.

FOX FARMERS:

Fox farmers secured an ample supply of dried and salted dog and humpback salmon for their needs.

SALMON HANDLING AND CANNING:

As far as I was able to determine there was little fish waste at any of the canneries of this district. In this respect the canneries of the Peninsula Area are especially well situated, their traps being close to the plant, thus necessitating but a short haul from the grounds to the canneries in nearly all instances.

With no regulations to hinder them, fish were obtained this year in more numerous localities than in the past. The Ikatan cannery obtained fish from the King Cove cannery traps in Bear, Morzhovoi, Belkofsky Bays and Nickolosky Spit after the fish had slackened in Ikatan Bay. The P. E. Harris Co. obtained fish in Morzhovoi and Cold Bays after the fish had slackened up in Ikatan Bay. The King Cove cannery was especially fortunate in enjoying a late run of red salmon which continually persisted in entering their Nickolosky Spit trap driven for the first time this year.

The Ikatan cannery of the Pacific American Fisheries was the first plant to begin canning operations this season, canning several cases on May 30th. They were followed in the order named: Shumigan Packing Co. of Squaw Harbor, P. E. Harris and Co. of False Pass, the Pacific American Fisheries of King Cove and Port Moller and the Everett Packing Co. of Herendeen Bay. The King Cove cannery of the Pacific American Fisheries put up the largest pack in the Alaska Peninsula Area. Detailed, confidential, preliminary reports will be mailed to the office from all of these plants. The Everett Packing Co. in Herendeen Bay was the first plant to cease operations in this area, followed by the Port Moller cannery of the Pacific American Fisheries. These two plants were followed by the Ikatan cannery of the Pacific American Fisheries, which canned last on August 17th and completed the removal of their gear on the same date; and P. E. Harris Co. of False Pass which completed the removal of their gear on August 19th and canned last on August 20th. The King Cove and Squaw Harbor plants continued operations until the close of the season on the evening of August 23rd.

VISITORS:

During the season the Alaska Peninsula Area was visited in the interests of Salmon Conservation by Dr. C. H. Gilbert of Stanford University, who studied the characteristics of the Red Salmon run and visited important salmon spawning areas.

PATROL:

A patrol of the waters of the Alaska Peninsula Area was maintained by Bureau representatives throughout the season. Mr. Oscar Borg was engaged as a stream watchman for Port Moller and vicinity and a copy of his operations has been sent to the Bureau. A special patrol of the Shumigan Islands and vicinity was also maintained by Mr. William Sullivan of the Bureau who will make a special report covering his activities. Ikatan Bay and vicinity as well as the water lying to the eastward, as far as Seal Cape on the south eastern side of Pavlof Bay was patrolled regularly by the fisheries patrol boat Merganser.

In the districts patrolled all fish traps were visited as often as time and weather and their importance would permit throughout the entire season. The majority of the traps were in fact visited each and every closed season and points and localities fished by purse seines or beach seines were also included in the patrol.

TRAPS:

Twenty-seven full size traps were driven in the Peninsula Area this season and twenty-five of them were fished throughout the greater part of the run. The two not fished to any extent were those driven upon the mainland of the Peninsula by the Shumigan Packing Co. On these there was no demand made for fish owing to the other traps of the company closer to the cannery providing an adequate amount of fish with which to run the cannery to capacity.

PURSE SEINES:

Thirteen full purse seines and three half purse seines were operated during the past season in the Alaska Peninsula Area. Of these purse seines, nine were operated in the Port Moller area, two in Ikatan and vicinity and two in King Cove and vicinity. The half purse seines were all operated in the Shumigan Islands.

BEACH SEINES:

Several beach seines were used by local residents and fox farmers in taking their local food requirements. A check of which it was impossible to secure owing to the more important work of regulation and investigation of commercial operators. Nine beach seines were operated in taking fish for commercial purposes. These were operated as follows: One in Swanson's Lagoon, one in Isanotski Strait, one in Little John Lagoon of Morzhovoi Bay, two in Cold Bay and the north shore of Deer Island, one at Sannak, one in Captain's Harbor, one at Long John's Lagoon and one at Orzenoi River.

NATIVE OPERATIONS:

The natives of the Peninsula Area this season participated in commercial fishing to a greater extent than ever before. Of the gear allotted to them through permit No. 54 - 1924, under the reservation system two traps were constructed, one in Belkosky Bay and the other at Nickolosky Spit. One beach seine was used at Long John's Point but fishing was poor so the seine was moved to Captain's Harbor in Belkosky Bay.

A mixed crew of natives and whites also operated in the vicinity of Morzhovoi village in Isanotski Strait for the P. E. Harris Co.

SALMON ENEMIES:

Hair seals and sea lions, natural enemies of the salmon, were quite numerous this year. They were noticeable off the mouth of Kinzaroff's Lagoon and Swanson's Lagoon, particularly while varying numbers of them were observed at different points throughout the Peninsula Area at different times. Sea lions seemed most numerous along the Ikatan Peninsula and in False Pass, they being almost continually present in these places. On one occasion while on patrol near East Anchor Cove on the Ikatan Peninsula, at least five hundred of them were observed in one body greatly resembling a small island. Throughout the entire season the traps in Ikatan Bay and vicinity were troubled with sea lions and many of them had to be shot of necessity to prevent damage to the trap webbing and the fish in the trap.

Sea gulls were in evidence in all of the lagoons of the region and particularly thick in the vicinity of the humpback and dog salmon streams. As far as I was able to observe, they injured the spawning salmon very little. In the shallow waters of the various lagoons of the Peninsula Region, salmon become stranded upon the bars while attempting to reach the spawning beds. I have personally witnessed vigorous red salmon strike shallow waters, become confused and push their way out upon some sand bar or flat and die. The dead carcasses of spawned out fish are also strewn about the flats and beaches of the lagoons and rivers of this region and it is upon these that the sea gulls mainly subsist.

Tern were observed in the Peninsula region solely in red salmon lagoons, the principle ones being, Thin Point, Kinzaroff's and Swanson's Lagoons. They undoubtedly are very destructive to young salmon.

PROHIBITIVE MONUMENTS:

Prohibitive monuments were placed five hundred yards from the mouth of salmon streams where commercial operations were being or might be conducted.

Next year the placing of monuments in the Alaska Peninsula Area should be undertaken early in the season and all streams marked. This will entail a good deal of work and should be given special consideration and ample time should be allowed for its completion.

LOCAL PERMITS:

Local permits were issued in much the same manner as in past seasons until the adoption of the new regulations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following recommendations are submitted:

1. The early reestablishment of prohibitive monuments marking all stream mouths in the area.
2. A removal of the protection accorded sea lions.
3. The purchase of a light out-board motor for use in examining the lagoons and spawning areas of the region.
4. The purchase of a sturdy sea-worthy boat with sufficient power for patrolling and cruising purposes with a cruising speed of not less than eight knots per hour.
5. The prohibition of commercial fishing with purse seines and floating traps throughout the entire Peninsula Area. (See paragraph on "Run Conservation").